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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: POLICE USE INAPPROPRIATE FORCE TO
DISPERSE JOURNALISTS' PICKET

REF: BAKU 758

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF JOAN POLASCHIK PER 1.4(B,D)

¶1. (SBU) On June 14, Baku police used an inappropriate level of force to disperse a group of approximately 25 journalists, who had staged an unsanctioned protest at a downtown Baku park. The journalists, who were reacting to the deteriorating media situation, had announced to the press that they would stage the protest in front of BP's office building, to demand that the company stop "selling democracy for oil." While police were preparing to respond to a gathering at BP's office building, the unforeseen protest at the park caught nearby police off-guard. Embassy contacts reported that police roughed-up the crowd, using their fists and their radio handsets to strike protesters, intentionally aiming at their kidneys. (NOTE: We believe that police were not armed with truncheons because the protest was unexpected at that location.)

¶2. (SBU) Nine individuals reported being beaten, including two journalists who had been covering the event, and had been wearing blue press vests to indicate that they were not participating in the protest. Three of these individuals reported having been beaten severely, including one Yeni Musavat newspaper reporter, who said he was simultaneously beaten by three police officers, receiving blows in his head, kidneys, and stomach. He was later given first aid by emergency medical attendants, who determined that he did not need to be hospitalized. Other protesters and journalists reported that they had been shoved by police.

¶3. (SBU) Four protesters were briefly detained, including Yeni Musavat Editor-In-Chief Rauf Arifoglu and Popular Front Party youth activist - and Bizim Yol newspaper reporter - Seymur Khaziyev. All detainees were released ten minutes after Emboffs arrived at the police station, ostensibly because of Embassy intervention; they had been detained for less than an hour. The four detainees did not appear to have suffered serious injuries, although some had scraped hands and one man's shirt had been torn in several places. Poloff spoke with Arifoglu on the scene, who confirmed that he was not seriously injured, and said that police had let them go with a warning.

¶4. (C) The police's aggressive break-up of the protest occurred less than two hours before the "Friends of Azerbaijan," an informal grouping of like-minded OSCE member states, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe, demarched Presidential Chief of Staff Ramiz Mehdiyev on media issues. Ambassador Derse raised the incident with Mehdiyev, expressing concern at the apparent use of inappropriate force to break up a peaceful protest. Mehdiyev, who said he was unaware of the incident, responded that the police never would use force to break up an authorized protest, and that the journalists likely had been conducting an illegal protest. See reftel for a full read-out of his response.

